

Engaging community organizations for undergraduate medical education curriculum renewal

Mobilisation des organismes communautaires pour la refonte du programme de formation médicale prédoctorale

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Published ahead of issue: Sept 6, 2022 CMEJ 2022 Available at <https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.74013>

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Implication Statement

As part of its social accountability mission, the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine invited community service learning (CSL) partner organizations to a guided, virtual conversation on April 12, 2021 to contribute to the future strategic directions for our curriculum. Representatives of 15 organizations participated and provided insights into how they perceive CSL students, the Faculty of Medicine, and the process of assessment. This workshop forged stronger bonds between the university and these community organizations and led to recommendations for their greater involvement going forward, an approach that could be considered by other Faculties of Medicine.

Énoncé des implications de la recherche

Dans le cadre de sa mission de responsabilité sociale, la Faculté de médecine de l'Université d'Ottawa a invité les organismes partenaires de l'apprentissage par le service communautaire (ASC) à contribuer aux futures orientations stratégiques de notre programme d'études par le biais d'une discussion virtuelle guidée, tenue le 12 avril 2021. Les représentants des 15 organismes qui y ont participé ont donné leur avis sur la façon dont ils perçoivent les étudiants en ASC, la Faculté de médecine et le processus d'évaluation. Cet atelier a permis de resserrer les liens entre l'université et ces organismes communautaires et a débouché sur des recommandations visant à renforcer leur participation à l'avenir, une approche qui pourrait être envisagée par d'autres facultés de médecine.

Introduction

As part of their commitment to social accountability, medical schools have a particular incentive understand how well their curricula address the priority health needs of the communities they serve.¹ Community service learning partners are a potential rich source of this information.² Despite “the importance of community voice in the development, implementation, and assessment of the impact of a service-learning course,”³ the community engagement literature gives little guidance about the best approaches to engagement for curriculum renewal.

Description of the innovation

We are currently undergoing a curriculum renewal process for our undergraduate medical education (UGME) program. To benefit from their perceptions and experiences and help us shape the community service learning (CSL) curriculum, we invited organizations that had hosted UGME students for CSL placements to discuss the question “*What is a medical student who is able to identify and respond to the priority needs of your community?*” This was a new approach for the Faculty. Representatives of 15 community organizations accepted our invitation to participate in a 2-hour virtual workshop in concert with student, faculty, and community members of

our Social Accountability Working Group. The workshop was guided by Whole Person Process Facilitation, a group meeting methodology from the Genuine Contact Program™ that deliberately taps into the creativity and collective genius of the participants to achieve maximum co-learning and results.⁴ The Office of Research Ethics and Integrity at the University of Ottawa determined that ethics review was not required, as these results form part of a program evaluation.

Outcomes

Over the course of the workshop, which alternated breakout room and full group discussions, we collected over 200 comments on a wide range of topics, such as student attributes and competencies, scheduling and matching processes, student feedback and evaluation, and community-Faculty relationships. We were able to get input that was directly relevant to how we should structure our student learning (see Table 1). Participants valued the opportunity to interact with one another and to contribute their insights to developing the CSL program.

We learned that community organizations are invested in education and want to be able to give and receive feedback, but they also get frustrated with some of the bureaucratic processes involved, such as matching CSL placements. They also recommended creation of a forum where they can collaborate on how to work with students and troubleshoot issues that arise. As a result of this process, we were confident about recommending that the Faculty of Medicine enhance and increase community organizations' involvement in our curricular processes.

Suggestions for next steps

This engaged approach to curricular renewal for CSL enabled us to take the pulse of what is happening in the community, and how the Faculty of Medicine can better interact with the community to our mutual benefit. Community organizations are a rich source of external views of the curriculum based on their past experiences with our students and their practical wisdom regarding what works and solutions to addressing hurdles and roadblocks. Being able to hear directly how they judge CSL placements provided invaluable input into how we assess these curricular components. We believe it has shown faculty, students, and organizations a new way of doing things that will enrich the CSL experiences.

Table 1. Themes that emerged in the workshop

Theme	Sub-themes
Communities valued certain attributes among learners	Creativity Curiosity Respect Organization and time management Humility
A socially accountable curriculum should graduate students with the following competencies:	Active listening, empathy and person-centred care Cultural safety The intersection of social context with health and health care Setting appropriate boundaries Advocacy Life-long learning Interprofessional care/teamwork Resilience
There is the potential for mutual transformation between learners, the Faculty and communities	
Certain processes emerged as important to the success of community service learning placements	Matching processes beyond a lottery system
	CSL scheduling that prioritizes community service as an integral part of student learning Enhanced training of learners prior to CSL placement (general to CSL placements and placement-specific) Process for placement sites to receive student feedback/evaluations Expanded opportunities for placement sites to set objectives with and assess students
There is greater potential for impact through placements where students take initiative and work on real problems	Initiative Allows/requires them to solve real problems that will have an impact
Communities valued longitudinal relationships with both students and the Faculty of Medicine	
"Just putting in the hours" did not contribute to value and meaning for either communities or learners	

Conflicts of Interest: The authors state that they have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Funding: Funding for this activity was provided by the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine.

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Published ahead of issue